



Northern Ireland Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday 22 January 2015
Room 29, Parliament Buildings

- Present: Mr Alex Maskey MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister MLA
Mr Gregory Campbell MLA
Mr Maurice Devenney MLA
Mrs Dolores Kelly MLA
Mr Fra McCann MLA
Mr Sammy Wilson MLA
- In Attendance: Dr Kevin Pelan (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Ashleigh Mitford (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Stephen Todd (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Stewart Kennedy (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr Richard Reid (Clerical Officer)
- Apologies: Mr Mickey Brady MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Michael Copeland MLA

The Chairperson declared the meeting open to the public at 10.06am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as noted above.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2015 were agreed.

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2015 were agreed.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 The Chairperson noted that today's evidence session with Cruse Bereavement Care is the last stakeholder evidence session scheduled in relation to the Pensions Bill and that, following this session, the Committee will agree on how to proceed in its consideration of the Bill.

3.2 The Committee noted that the Regeneration Bill is now at Committee Stage. Given the current workload, the Committee discussed the merits of an extension to the Committee Stage.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to lay a motion seeking an extension to the committee stage of the Regeneration Bill until 28 May 2015.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to schedule a departmental briefing on the Bill in February.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue the call to evidence for consideration stage of the Bill.

3.3 The Chairperson noted that, following today's briefings, the Committee will convene in closed session to conduct an initial review of evidence in respect of Phase 3 of the Committee's Inquiry.

3.4 *Agreed:* The Committee agreed to hold a discussion regarding the issue of stock transfer at Rinmore at the meeting following receipt of information on this matter from the Department.

4. Pensions Bill – Briefing by Cruse Bereavement Care

The following officials joined the meeting at 10.12am:

- Anne Townsend, Director, Cruse Bereavement Care
- Alison Penny, Coordinator, Childhood Bereavement Network

Sammy Wilson MLA joined the meeting at 10.13am.

Gregory Campbell MLA joined the meeting at 10.15am.

The officials briefed the Committee on their response to the Pensions Bill, noting that they made representation to the Westminster Pensions Bill last year.

The briefing raised issues in relation to the clauses in the Bill relating to bereavement support payment including the impact of the Bill on widowed parents with dependent children, the duration of Bereavement Support Payments, the conditionality relating to the benefit and the impact on unmarried partners with children.

The officials took questions from the Committee.

The officials left the meeting at 10.59am.

This session was recorded by Hansard.

5. Pensions Bill – Departmental Briefing

The following officials joined the meeting at 11.00am:

- Anne McCleary, Director, Social Security, Policy and Legislation Division, DSD
- Gerry McCann, Social Security, Policy and Legislation Division, DSD
- Seamus Cassidy, Social Security, Policy and Legislation Division, DSD
- Rosemary Hughes, Departmental Official, DSD

The officials briefed the Committee on issues raised during the briefing from Cruse Bereavement Care and took questions from the Committee.

Anne McCleary left the meeting at 11.31am.

Mickey Kelly joined the meeting at 11.31am.

The officials briefed the Committee on the specialist advice service provided by the Social Security Agency for people faced with bereavement.

The officials left the meeting at 11.39am.

This session was recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reconvene at its meeting on Thursday 29 January 2015 to discuss all evidence taken in relation to the Pensions Bill.

6. SR 2 The Housing Benefit (Executive Determinations) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

The Committee had no objections to the Rule.

The Chairperson read the following motion into the record:

That the Committee for Social Development has considered the Statutory Rule SR2/2015 The Housing Benefit (Executive Determinations) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report, has no objections to the Rule.

7. Correspondence

7.1 *Agreed:* The Committee agreed to consider correspondence from the Department in relation to National Insurance contributions when reviewing evidence.

7.2 *Agreed:* The Committee agreed to consider correspondence from GMB, Prospect and Unite unions proposing a dispensation in the Pensions Bill when reviewing evidence.

7.3 *Agreed:* The Committee agreed to action the rest of the correspondence as outlined in the correspondence memo.

8. Forward Work Programme

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme as drafted.

9. AOB

There was no other business.

10. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Social Development will take place on Thursday 29 January 2015 at 10.00am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

Proceedings were suspended at 11.45am.

Proceedings recommenced in closed session at 11.56am.

The Committee conducted an initial review of evidence in relation to Phase 3 of its Inquiry.

The Committee was updated on the action taken to secure release of the fact-finding report into the special adviser.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the key issues to consider in respect of Phase 3 of its Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that no further witnesses would be required at this time.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the former Minister for Social Development seeking clarification in respect of an apparent contradiction in evidence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the BBC requesting that representatives attend to give evidence to the Committee.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.52pm.

Alex Maskey
Chairperson, Committee for Social Development

29 January 2015